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# FRANCE CONCEDES ITS AGENTS SANK GREENPEACE BOAT

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Special to The New York Times

PARIS, Sept. 22 — The French Government admitted tonight that agents of its intelligence service sank an anti-nuclear protest ship in New Zealand.

Prime Minister Laurent Fabius said the agents had been ordered to sabotage the ship, but he did not say who gave the orders or who knew about the plan in advance.

In the two and a half months since the incident, senior Government officials had steadfastly denied responsibility in the sinking of the boat.

Mr. Fabius said the truth had been concealed from an investigator, Bernard Tricot, appointed by the Government last month to look into the affair.

## 'They Acted Under Orders'

"It was agents of the D.G.S.E. that sank the boat," Mr. Fabius said, referring to the French intelligence service. "They acted under orders." He said that "this truth was hidden" from Mr. Tricot.

"The truth in this affair is cruel," the Prime Minister added. "But what is essential is that it be clearly and totally established, as I have committed myself to doing."

But Mr. Fabius said the Government would not name the agents who carried out the attack on the Greenpeace boat. "It would be unacceptable," he said, "to expose military personnel who were only obeying orders and who have at times carried out very dangerous missions for the country in the past."

Mr. Fabius's unexpected declaration tonight followed the resignation of Defense Minister Charles Hernu on Friday and the dismissal of the head of the intelligence agency, Adm. Pierre Lacoste. Mr. Hernu said he was stepping down because his subordinates had failed to disclose the truth about the sinking of the ship, the Rainbow Warrior, which was operated by the environmentalist group Greenpeace.

## Protest Flotilla Was Planned

The Rainbow Warrior was sunk by explosives on July 10 in Auckland Harbor as it was preparing to lead a flotilla protesting French nuclear weapons testing in the South Pacific. One crew member, a Greenpeace photographer, was killed in the attack.

In confirming French responsibility for an operation that President François Mitterrand has condemned as an "absurd crime," Mr. Fabius was acknowledging that French press accounts, which have consistently conflicted with statements by Government officials, were essentially correct.

The admission was bound to further embarrass the Socialist Government, which faces its worst crisis since it came to power in May 1981.

Mr. Hernu's resignation and Admiral Lacoste's dismissal followed French press reports that they, with other senior officials in the military and the intelligence service, had apparently planned and ordered the Rainbow Warrior operation and then concealed their role from the Government investigator.

Mr. Hernu's departure was followed by renewed calls among opposition leaders for Mr. Fabius to resign. While there appears to be no way to force the Prime Minister to step down, tonight's admission will almost certainly increase pressure on him to do so.

Although the Government had until now denied responsibility for the sinking, the report by Mr. Tricot and subsequent statements by Mr. Hernu acknowledged that at least five intelligence agents had been sent to New Zealand to collect information on Greenpeace's protest plans.

## First Findings in Inquiry

Mr. Fabius, appearing grim and formal tonight, summoned reporters to his office shortly before 9 P.M. to announce the first findings in an investigation of the affair by Paul Quilès, who was named on Friday to succeed Mr. Hernu as Defense Minister.

In his brief declaration, Mr. Fabius did not resolve several of the key remaining questions in the affair, in particular who in the Government gave the order to sink the Greenpeace vessel and who had been informed of the affair in advance.

Press reports, in addition to asserting the involvement of Mr. Hernu and Admiral Lacoste, have said that two senior military officers, Gen. Jeannou Lacaze and Gen. Jean Saulnier, played a role in planning the operation.

General Saulnier was at the time the special military adviser to Mr. Mitterrand, and if investigations indicate he had advance knowledge of the attack, the affair will have reached into the President's office.

In a statement tonight shortly before Mr. Fabius addressed the press, Georgina Dufoix, the Government spokesman, said that "neither the chief of state nor the Government gave the order to sink the Rainbow Warrior."

## Major Problem Is Credibility

The Government's major problem has become not so much the attack itself, which provoked little criticism or outrage in France, but the credibility of the Government's assertions that it has been trying to determine the truth in the matter ever since.

Government officials have denied involvement in the affair only to have disclosures in the press discredit the denials. The day before he resigned, Mr. Hernu rejected allegations that any orders had been given to sink the Greenpeace ship and said reports that French agents had carried out the attack represented a "campaign of calumny against military officers."

Mr. Hernu's resignation seemed to signal a decision by the top Government leaders, presumably Mr. Mitterrand and Mr. Fabius, to try to end the crisis by taking firm action against those implicated. Mr. Fabius has pressed for further inquiries by the De-

fense Ministry and has vowed to make all the findings public.

But since Mr. Hernu's resignation, commentators have predicted that the political uproar will continue until the full truth is known.

## Demands for Resignation

Opposition politicians have called for both Mr. Mitterrand and Mr. Fabius to resign over the Greenpeace affair, and figures close to the chief opposition leaders said tonight that those calls would continue. The Socialists have a solid majority in Parliament.

In addition, the resignation of Mr. Hernu and the dismissal of Admiral Lacoste are said to have displeased many officials in the French military, whose support can affect public sentiment toward the Government.

In his statement tonight, Mr. Fabius seemed to satisfy a key demand of the opposition, made after Mr. Hernu's resignation, that a parliamentary inquiry into the affair be initiated. The move is likely to keep the Government's handling of the crisis in the forefront of public attention.